

Student Unit Organizer

**ASSESSMENT(s):**

* **Planning**
* **Photo-Essay**
* **Thinking Artistically**
* **Composition**
* **Presentation**
* **Participation**
* **Contact Sheet**
* **Artist Statement/Critical Questions**

Photojournalism

Part I: The Photo-Essay

DUE DATE

SCORE

**CRITICAL QUESTION(s) / ARTIST STATEMENT:**

1. **What is a photojournalist’s obligation to his/her subject?**
2. **What role does the photojournalist play in today’s society?**
3. **Tell the story of your photo-essay.**
4. **What aspect(s) of this assignment did you find challenging and/or easy? Explain.**

Visual Art—Delaune

Student Unit Organizer

**OBJECTIVE(s):**

* **Photojournalism**
* **How it began?**
* **Becoming a Photojournalist**
* **Thinking Artistically**
* **Documentary subjects**
* **The Single Image**
* **The Photo-Essay**
* **Street Photography**

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### Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Photojournalism**

When we think of photojournalism, newspapers and magazines come to mind with their focus on news and current events. These images often record war, natural disasters, and other terrible experiences. But documentary images don’t have to be about catastrophes. Magazines like *National Geographic* feature dazzling images of exotic places and people, as well as photographs of the daily lives of people close to home. The most important aspect of documentary photographs is that they tell a true story. This is the journalism side of photojournalism. Good photojournalism takes a stand on a subject or an event and has a definite point of view. The attitudes and feelings of the photographers come through their images. Many times it’s the emotional content that connects the viewer to the image and its subject, and creates a hard-hitting photograph.

It’s important to remember that documentary photographs should always be truthful: nothing should be faked by making things up on a computer to create new “realities.” Serious trouble results for reporters and photojournalists if they fabricate news or photos. The job of the photojournalist is to inform us, intrigue us, and make us care, but never to deceive us.

**How It Began:**

Since photography captures images from the real world, it has always been valued for its honesty and accuracy. Because of this, documentary photography began soon after photography was invented in 1839. Within a few years of its invention, travel photographer Francis Firth began to photograph exotic locations like Egypt for eager audiences in England and Europe.

In 1855, Roger Fenton used a camera to document the Crimean War in Europe. He took the first war photographs, but they were mostly landscapes and posed group shots of the soldiers. It wasn’t until the American Civil War (1861-1865) that Matthew Brady and Timothy O’Sullivan would photograph actual battles and reveal the human casualties of war.

People who wanted to bring about social change soon began to use photography for their causes. In the 1890s, Jacob Riis, a crusading New York newspaper reporter, began to write about and photograph the desperate living conditions of immigrants in New York City’s Lower East Side slums. The images he made were shocking to all who saw them, and were later used in a now-famous book about life in the slums, called *How the Other Half Lives.*

From 1908 until 1930, Lewis Hine photographed and campaigned to change child labor laws in the United States. Hine produced images that highlighted the dangers that many children faced every day of their lives while working in mines and factories. Because of his photography, the laws were changed.

Through the twentieth century and now in the twenty-first century, photojournalists have continued to expose the harsh realities of life to people around the world.

Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange documented the victims of the Great Depression. Margaret Bourke-White covered World War II, including both combat and the concentration camps in Europe. Robert Capa covered most of the wars of the twentieth century, eventually losing his life in Southeast Asia when he stepped on a land mine while documenting the First Indochina War in Vietnam.

W. Eugene Smith risked his own life to reveal the mercury pollution in a small Japanese village during the early 1970s. Today, photographers like Sebastiao Salgado and Eugene Richards continue to carry on the important work of exposing injustices and revealing the truth they see in the world.

**Becoming a Photojournalist—Thinking Artistically:**

Photojournalism conveys specific meanings related to certain people and/or events. It’s important for the viewer to “read,” or interpret, an image’s meaning correctly. As a photojournalist, composition choices to consider are viewpoint, timing, proportion, and value.

Viewpoint refers to your location when you take a photograph. The level of your camera in relation to your subject’s eyes affects a viewer’s interpretation of the subject. Shooting from below, looking up, makes the subject appear bigger and more important. Shooting from above makes the subject seem smaller and just a part of the scene. Eye-level shots create an intimacy, bringing the viewer eye to eye with the subject.

Proportion, how objects relate to one another in size, also adds emphasis. Making the subject the same size as other objects in the image gives the background equal importance. Making the subject bigger than other objects gives it primary importance.

Value refers to light and dark tones in your image, which emphasize specific objects or parts of the composition. Remember, lighter objects attract attention in an otherwise dark image, and vice versa. Value increases emotional content in an image, conveying the feelings you want a viewer to experience. Mostly dark images are more powerful, suspenseful, or threatening. Mostly light images are associated with lighter, more upbeat emotions.

Emphasis directs a viewer’s attention to what is important in your image. Dominance and subordination can emphasize certain elements in an image. Dominance makes some parts of the image more important by making them bigger in the frame, while subordination makes other parts less noticeable.

Emphasize the main subject by making it fill the frame with the subject. A telephoto lens can do this. Getting close with a wide-angle or normal lens also makes the subject appear bigger than anything else in its surroundings, increasing its importance.

Create dominance by making the subjects brighter than other things around it, with the subject standing in the brightest light in the scene while the surroundings are in shadow. A small electronic flash can direct more light on the subject.

When you are photographing, look around for parts of a scene that you could use to frame and isolate elements in an image. Windows, doorways, arches, and other architectural elements are excellent ways to create a frame for your subject within the image. This is a great way to focus a viewer’s attention on your subject.

**Documentary Subjects:**

The goal of photojournalism is to tell a true story. So before you begin photographing an event, think about the best way to tell its story. What is happening and why is it happening? What is the most important aspect of the event? How do the people you are photographing feel about the event? How do you feel about it?

**The Single Image:**

Newspapers and magazines are filled with single images that show us glimpses of other people’s lives. The most successful of these images are dynamic compositions that are full of energy and life, and brimming with emotions and drama. They can also focus on the absurdities and humor that are everywhere in life. Even though it is impossible to tell a complete story about anything or anyone with one photograph, single-image documentary photographs try very hard to do just that.

Your images should focus on people who are reacting to the events that are happening around them. They could be doing their jobs or enjoying their hobbies, performing music or playing in a sports event. Try to avoid having the subjects look directly into the camera or pose for the photograph.

Timing is a critical element in photojournalism. Good timing lets you capture the crucial moment that conveys the essence of your subject. It also influences a viewer’s interpretation of your subject. When people are talking, catch them in mid-word, with mouths open and faces animated, or with mouths closed, looking like they’re lost in thought.

You want your subjects to be active, so you can photograph their reactions to whatever it is they are doing. Provide context for the image by including a lot of the subjects’ surroundings. It’s important to include the background so we can know what is going on and what the subjects of the photographs are doing. The subjects themselves can be less dominant in the photograph.

**The Photo-Essay:**

The photo-essay is similar to a documentary because it tries to capture events that really happened. By illustrating a larger story with several images, the photographer can tell that story more completely, showing more aspects of the story and focusing on the smaller details that might otherwise be left out.

The photographer can also show the sequence of events in the story. Newspapers and magazines occasionally run examples, but many photo-essays are intended to become books. These stories require a larger commitment from the photographer. It takes a lot of time to tackle these bigger stories, but the reward for the photographer is greater as well.

A photo-essay has room for many different kinds of pictures. Take some overall shots of the setting or scene, with or without people, and you can include shots of the surrounding architecture or landscape. Next, get closer and capture people in the setting doing whatever they normally do.

You can then get even closer and focus on your subjects’ facial expressions, while they are involved in the events of their lives. If they are working with their hands, go in close for a shot of the hands building or making something. If they use tools or instruments of some kind, take photographs of those.

The key to creating a photo-essay is to have a lot of images from which to choose. Shoot more pictures than you think you’ll be able to use. Professional photographers only use 10 percent of the images they shoot, so you’ll want at least ten times the number of shots you think you’ll actually use. If you plan on doing a six-image essay, try to shoot at least 60 images of your subject, or two rolls of film. This may sound like a lot, but this is how the pros do it.

**Street Photography:**

Street Photography can look a lot like photojournalism, except that it doesn’t really try to capture specific news events or stories. It is more like art photography. Its goal is to capture a single instant in time, when people and their surroundings come together in interesting and beautiful shapes and combinations.

Compared to regular photojournalism, street photography can seem somewhat random. What really separates it from other kinds of photography is that the images represent ideas like “injustice” or “strength,” instead of just being the reality of what is shown in the pictures. Street photography combines the subject matter of photojournalism with the formal composition and symbolism of art photography.

Poetry employs a device called *metaphor* that uses one thing to describe or represent something else. In the same way, street photographs can be metaphors for ideas or emotions. For example, a broken, abandoned doll can represent lost childhood. Like poetry, this type of photograph is not so much concerned with the actual subject of the image, but what the subject represents. Think of street photography as visual poetry.

Summary:

Assignment:

The objective of this assignment is to demonstrate photojournalism. As you read there are a couple of ways to achieve this. For this assignment you will create a photo-essay containing 3 pictures.

Photograph the activities and subjects that best illustrate your feelings and impressions of the event, and then select the images that best represent them. Here are a few examples of events you could cover:

* A day in the life of “\_\_\_\_”: Follow someone from morning until night, photographing the major and minor events of his or her typical day at work, school, or home.
* Athletic events: Work to capture the emotion of the athletes, spectators, cheerleaders, coaches, and the drama of the event.
* Music performances: Capture the intensity of the individual performances, the interactions of the musicians, and the reactions of the audience.
* Behind the scenes at a play: Drama not only happens on stage in a play, it happens backstage, as well. Photograph the actors and stage crew as they do their jobs.
* Hobbies: People have all sorts of interesting hobbies, from model trains to taxidermy. Photograph people doing what they love to do.
* Horse shows: photograph the animals, their owners, or the spectators. Be open to surprising and delightful encounters and interactions.

Can you think of anymore examples?

First you will complete task exercise #9, the brainstorming exercise on the following page. This will help you figure out what you want your subject to be. Remember, in the reading it stated that the professionals use only ten percent of what they shot. You will shoot at least 50 images of your subject. The images may not consist of different subjects—it has to be 50 images of the same object or scene. You will select your favorite 3 pictures to compose as a photo essay in Photoshop. You will create a blank image in Photoshop and cut and paste your three images together. You may not digitally enhance your image. Photojournalism is telling the truth! You will need to save your image as your first initial last name photo essay. You will create a folder to place your image and contact sheet in. After everything is complete you will copy and paste your folder to the server.

* **Concept:** Photojournalism—Photo-essay
* **Subject matter:** whatever subject you choose to portray
* Need one contact sheet of at least 50 pictures of the same subject
* 3 images composed in Photoshop as photo essay (may NOT be digitally enhanced)

**Task Exercise #9: Documenting a Subject**

Think about what you really care about—people, places, organizations, and events. Write about some of these subjects and try to figure out which one would make a suitable subject for photography. Make some notes on how you would photograph the subject in terms of viewpoint, timing, and emphasis.

Brainstorm and create three options:

Emphasis

Emphasis

Emphasis

Timing

Timing

Timing

Viewpoint

Viewpoint

Viewpoint

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

**Critical Questions / Artist Statement**

1. **What is a photojournalist obligation to his/her subject?**
2. **What role does the photojournalist play in today’s society?**
3. **Tell the story of your photo-essay.**
4. **What aspect(s) of this assignment did you find challenging and/or easy? Explain.**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Write the number under the “Rate Yourself” column that best shows how well you feel you completed that criterion for the assignment. | **Excellent-Good**  **(10-9)** | Average **(8)** | **Needs**  **Improvement**    **(7)** | **Unsatisfactory**  **(6-0)** | **Student** | **Teacher** |
| Criteria 1-  **Planning:**  *Did you think through your composition and experiment with options?* | Thoughtfully completed brainstorming exercise. | Gives some thought to complete the brainstorming exercise. | Does not put thought into completing the brainstorming exercise. | Does not complete the brain storming exercise |  |  |
| Criteria 2-  **Photo-Essay :**  *Do the submitted images tell a story and demonstrate a successful photo-essay?* | Final images successfully portray a photo-essay. | Final images adequately portray a photo-essay. | Final image needs more work to successfully portray a photo-essay. | Final image does not portray a photo-essay. |  |  |
| Criteria 3-  **Thinking Artistically :**  *Do the submitted images’ viewpoints, timing, and emphasis add to the composition?* | Images display an excellent viewpoint, very creative and adds to the composition. | Images display an adequate viewpoint, creative and adds to the composition. | Viewpoint needs improvement. Little thought was placed on viewpoint and takes away from composition. | Obvious that viewpoint was not considered when composing images. |  |  |
| Images display impeccable timing; subject(s) are caught in action not even noticing the camera. | Timing is adequate; subject(s) are somewhat caught in action. | Timing needs improvement. Subject(s) are aware of the camera and is distracting to the viewer. | Obvious that timing was not considered when shooting images, subject(s) are posed. |  |  |
| Excellent use of emphasis; it’s placed on the correct subject and adds to composition. | Adequate use of emphasis; it’s placed on the correct subject. | Emphasis needs improvement; it’s not placed on subject and distracts the viewer. | Obvious that emphasis was not considered when composing images. |  |  |
| Criteria 4-  **Composition :**  *Do the elements of art and principles of design contribute to the overall composition?* | Image’s over all composition is excellent. Placement, clarity, principles and elements all contribute to the composition. | Image’s over all composition is adequate. Placement, clarity, principles and elements contribute to the composition. | Image’s over all composition is tolerable. Placement, clarity, principles and elements need further attention. | Image’s over all composition is inadequate. Composition needs further work. |  |  |
| Criteria 5-  **Participation:**  *Did you use class time efficiently? Did you clean up your area? Did you annotate your packet?* | Excellent use of class time. Area kept extremely clean.  Equipment was taken care of. Excellent annotation of packet. | Good use of class time. Area kept somewhat clean.  Equipment was taken care of. Good annotation of packet. | Used class time inefficiently. Area kept fairly clean.  Equipment was taken care of. Fair annotation of packet. | Was not productive in class. Project is incomplete. Area was not kept clean. Equipment was not put away properly. Annotation of packet needs improvement. |  |  |
| Criteria 6-  **Presentation:**  *Did you successfully name image and upload to server?* | Successfully names and submits images correctly. | Inadequately named or submitted images. | Inadequately named and submitted images. | Did not follow directions. |  |  |
| Criteria 7-  **Contact Sheet:**  *Does your contact sheet display at least 50 images of the same subject?* | Contact sheet displays at least 50 images of the same subject and all are appropriate for assignment. | Contact sheet displays at least 40 images of the same subject and all are appropriate for assignment. | Contact sheet displays at least 50 images of different subjects and some are suitable for the assignment. | Contact sheet displays less than 40 images. |  |  |
| Criteria 8-  **Artist Statement /Critical Questions:**  *Did you complete the questions provided for the artist statement in complete sentences?* | All four questions are answered clearly and in complete sentences. | Three questions are answered clearly and in complete sentences. | Two questions are answered clearly and in complete sentences.  Total: | One question is answered clearly and in complete sentences. |  |  |

**Teacher Comments:**